

**Michael Cox and Richard Campanaro**

## Introduction to international relations: undergraduate study in economics, management, finance and the social sciences

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**UNIVERSITY  
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PROGRAMMES

# **Introduction to international relations**

M. Cox

with R. Campanaro

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**2012**

Undergraduate study in  
**Economics, Management,  
Finance and the Social Sciences**

This is an extract from a subject guide for an undergraduate course offered as part of the University of London International Programmes in Economics, Management, Finance and the Social Sciences. Materials for these programmes are developed by academics at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE).

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THE LONDON SCHOOL  
OF ECONOMICS AND  
POLITICAL SCIENCE ■



This guide was written for the University of London International Programmes by Professor Michael Cox, Professor of International Relations, London School of Economics and Political Science. Professor Cox has written more than 20 volumes – the most recent being *Soft power and US foreign policy* (Routledge, 2010) and *The global 1989: continuity and change in world politics* (Cambridge, 2010). Between 2006 and 2009 he was chair of the European Consortium for Political Research and before that he served on the executive committee of the British International Studies Association and the Irish National Committee for the Study of International Affairs. He is also an associate research fellow at Chatham House, London, and between 2001 and 2002 was director of the David Davies Memorial Institute for the Study of International Politics based at the University of Aberystwyth. In 2002, 2007 and again in 2011 he was appointed as a research fellow at the Nobel Institute in Oslo, and in 2003 was made chair of the United States Discussion Group at the Royal Institute of International Affairs, London. In 2007, Professor Cox became an associate fellow on the Transatlantic Programme at the Royal United Services Institute Whitehall. He is co-director of IDEAS, a centre of strategy and diplomacy based at the LSE, and editor of the journal *International Politics*.

In writing the 2012 edition of the subject guide, Professor Cox had additional editorial support from Richard Campanaro a PhD student in the LSE's Department of International Relations.

This is one of a series of subject guides published by the University. We regret that due to pressure of work the authors are unable to enter into any correspondence relating to, or arising from, the guide. If you have any comments on this subject guide, favourable or unfavourable, please use the form at the back of this guide.

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*Michael Cox, LSE  
November 2011*



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## Notes

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# Introduction

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Of all the students of the social sciences taught in universities, those concerned with IR probably encounter the greatest degree of misunderstanding and ignorance, and engage in more ground-clearing, conceptual, factual and ethical, than any other.

*Halliday, F. Rethinking international relations.  
(Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1994) p.5*

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## Introduction to the subject area

Students of this new course are bound to ask the question – what exactly is IR? What distinguishes it from history or law, economics or political science? When did IR emerge as an academic subject? How has it changed over time? What does IR contribute to the sum of human knowledge? And why has it become one of the most popular twenty-first century social sciences, despite the fact that – according to Halliday at least – IR students have to spend more time than most defending and defining their subject?

The purpose of this course is to try and answer these questions while providing you with a foundation for some of the more specialised IR topics that you may choose to study in the coming years. We will look in some detail at both the real world problems which IR addresses, and some of the essential theories it employs to understand the international system. This course does not presuppose a specialised knowledge of international affairs. On the other hand, it does assume that you will have a genuine interest in world politics and a willingness to expand your knowledge of geography and key moments in international history. This course is therefore a roadmap and guide to complex issues. Rather than trying to be exhaustive, it seeks to introduce you to a wide range of issues and problems that have preoccupied writers, scholars and policy-makers for many decades – even centuries. Instead of arguing in favour of a specific approach or pointing to an absolute truth in IR, this course will ask you to think about international events in a systematic and critical fashion, coming to well-reasoned conclusions based on a combination of empirical observation and theoretical rigour. The aim, in other words, is to inform and stimulate and, in so doing, to get you to ask questions and think of answers that you may never have thought of before.

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## Syllabus

This course examines the evolution of IR and the international systems it describes, focusing especially on ways in which social structures bring order to our otherwise anarchic international society. In doing so it considers: the evolution of IR in practice and theory during the twentieth century; the impact of international history on the development of the discipline prior to 1919; the end of the Cold War and the failure of IR to predict this epochal shift; the nature of globalisation and its influence on the discipline's main theories and concepts; the similarities and differences between mainstream approaches to IR; the alternatives presented by some of the discipline's newer theoretical schools; the difficulties implicit in defining and limiting war between and within states; the contentious place of peace in international society; the role and responsibilities of the

state as one actor among many in the international system; our changing understanding of international power; the impact of globalisation and the end of the Cold War on actors' definitions of security; the difficulties of global governance in an anarchic international society; and the likely impact of Asia's (especially China's) rise on the units, processes and structures of the international system.

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## Aims of this course

This course aims to:

- explore the evolution of the discipline of IR over the past century by examining our changing understandings of order within the anarchic international system
- consider the impact of major historical events on the evolution of academic IR, including the ongoing impact of globalisation
- introduce you to a range of theoretical tools that will help you to examine the behaviour of international actors and the nature of international systems
- define and discuss some of the main concepts within the discipline, including war, peace, the state and power
- critically assess challenges facing contemporary international society, including security, global governance and the rise of East Asian actors.

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## Learning outcomes

At the end of the course, and having completed the Essential reading and activities, you should be able to:

- explain the relevance of key terms in IR
- identify the strengths and weaknesses of IR's various theoretical approaches
- analyse international events from a variety of theoretical viewpoints
- describe the nature of units and social structures within the contemporary international system.

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## The structure of this guide

Chapters in this subject guide follow a standard format. Each begins by listing the aims and the learning outcomes that you are meant to achieve by the chapter's end. Read these carefully and keep them in mind as you work your way through the course material. International relations (IR), like many academic subjects, is too vast to cover in a single course. The learning outcomes will help you to focus on the main topics selected for that chapter.

Next, you will find the chapter's Essential reading. The vast majority of this will be from the textbook (see Essential reading below), with a few selected journal articles that you will be able to access via the Online Library in the Student Portal (see Overview of learning resources below). You will be prompted to read these as you work through the subject guide so wait until you reach the appropriate section. Along with each reading is a set of questions or activities designed to help you to connect with the material.

Next, you will find a list of Further reading, mainly scholarly articles that address specific points raised in the text. These should be read once you have worked your way through the entire chapter and will give

you additional sources from which to draw as you prepare essays and examination questions.

Throughout this subject guide, you will find key terms highlighted in **bold** and summarised at the end of each chapter. Note these terms down in a glossary. Many terms used by IR scholars are contested. That is to say, there is no single agreed-upon definition that you can memorise and use every time a word comes up. Keep track of how different thinkers use the vocabulary that you are learning. As you will discover, language is a powerful tool in IR and it is well-worth investing your time to understand its multiple meanings.

Chapters also include several activities that are designed to help you to think through important points covered in the subject guide. These should be completed as you work your way through the course. **Unless otherwise stated, all reading for the activities is taken from, the textbook.** Chapters conclude with a set of sample examination questions. You should try to answer each of these in a short essay of between 500 and 1,000 words. Your answers can be shared with peers and an academic moderator on the VLE, where the questions will also form the basis for a set of podcasts by LSE academics.

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## Overview of learning resources

### The subject guide

Part 1 of this course provides a brief overview of how IR first came into being as an academic subject. It examines the influence of the First and Second World Wars on the discipline, as well as the ways in which the Cold War affected its evolution, covering the period from 1914 to around 1989. The first chapter covers a lot of ground, including your first thumbnail sketches of several important IR theories. Take your time with these. As we will discuss at several points in this subject guide, theories are simplifying devices that we use in IR to draw general conclusions from a limited number of examples. Different theories answer different kinds of questions and emphasise different kinds of IR, so do not waste your time trying to decide which theory is absolutely correct. Just as different jobs around the house require different tools, different questions in IR also require different theories. Relying on one to the exclusion of all others is rather like a plumber arriving at your home armed with a single screwdriver!

Part 2 provides a theoretically-informed history of contemporary IR, including the development of important concepts such as the international system and international society. Its chapters each focus on one of three key episodes: Europe's imperial expansion and global dominance between 1500 and 1914 (Chapter 2), the end of the Cold War between 1989 and 1991 (Chapter 3) and the subsequent rise of globalisation (Chapter 4). The intervening years, 1914 to 1989, are covered in Chapter 1. The historical material in Part 2 plays a double role. First, it contextualises the changing world of contemporary IR, providing you with a set of historical cases that can be used to support your opinions and analysis. Second, it gives you the opportunity to see how different theories can be used to produce different interpretations of any given event. Chapter 2 is particularly important in this respect, as it introduces you to the main idea behind the English School of IR – international society.

In Part 3 we 'go theoretical' by examining other key IR theories in more depth. Here we point out, among other things, that theories have practical applications and should not be indulged in for their own sake. Chapter

5 looks at two mainstream approaches to the subject: Liberalism and Realism. Chapter 6 examines several alternative theories in the IR toolbox. These highlight different aspects of IR than their orthodox counterparts, often with the goal of unmasking people, units, processes or structures that orthodox theories tend to ignore.

In Part 4, we look at some of the key concepts around which IR debates still revolve: war, peace, the state and power. These are central to the study of IR, and are all too often presented as highly abstract. We will try to show why IR needs these concepts, and how they can be used to make sense of the real world.

Part 5 will conclude by examining three of the key challenges facing the world: new security threats facing international society, the role of international organisations in global governance, and the changing distribution of power and influence between the West and the East. The final chapter will conclude by looking at three interrelated questions:

1. Is the USA in decline after having enjoyed unrivalled dominance since the collapse of the USSR?
2. Are there other great powers out there – most obviously China – willing, and able, to replace the USA at the head of the international table?
3. Does the increasing influence of emerging powers indicate a more general decline of the West and the rise of what is loosely called the 'East'?

These have been much talked about since the beginning of the new millennium. If analyses of the eastward shift are accurate – as many seem to believe – it represents a massive change in world politics. If, on the other hand, the decline of the West, or the rise of the East, has been overstated, our world will see power and decision making remain in the hands of the same combination of largely Western states that have sat at the centre of international society for the past 500 years. Your job at the end of the course will be to assess these arguments both on their empirical merits and by examining the theoretical assumptions on which they rest.

## Essential reading

This guide has been written to work alongside the textbook for this course:

Baylis, J., S. Smith and P. Owens *The globalization of world politics: an introduction to international relations*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010) fifth edition [ISBN 9780199569090].

As you work your way through the next 13 chapters, you will be prompted to read specific sections from the textbook. **Unless otherwise stated, all Essential reading for this guide comes from this textbook.** Only chapter titles will therefore be provided. The textbook contains a fairly extensive glossary which will be of use.

Detailed reading references in this guide refer to the edition of the textbook listed above. A new edition may have been published by the time you study this course. You can use a more recent edition of the book; use the detailed chapter and section headings and the index to identify relevant readings. Also check the VLE regularly for updated guidance on readings.

You can also access the following book via the **Introduction to international relations** page of the virtual learning environment (VLE):

Griffiths, M., T. O'Callaghan and S.C. Roach *International relations: the key concepts*. (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007) second edition [ISBN 9780415774376].

The following articles are also Essential reading and are available on the Online Library:

- Galtung, J. 'Violence, peace and peace research', *Journal of Peace Research* 6(3) 1969, pp.166–91.
- Hirst, P. 'The Eighty Years' Crisis, 1919–1999 – power', *Review of Additional International Studies* 24(5) 1998, pp.133–48.

## Further reading

### General overview

- Brown, C. and K. Ainley *Understanding international relations*. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009) fourth edition [ISBN 9780230213111]. A concise, if somewhat advanced, text, focusing on the relationship between international relations theories and twentieth-century events.
- Burchill, S., Linklater A, Devetak R et al. *Theories of international relations*. (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009) fourth edition [ISBN 9780230219236]. An edited volume with individual chapters that deal with the major theoretical approaches to the study of international relations.
- Cox, M. and D. Stokes (eds) *US foreign policy*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012) second edition [ISBN 9780199585816]. An edited volume with chapters by leading thinkers in the field, covering all aspects of US foreign policy including its relationships with the different regions of the world.
- Dunne, T., M. Cox and K. Booth (eds) *The Eighty Years' Crisis: international relations 1919–1999*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) [ISBN 9780521667838]. A comprehensive edited volume examining the influence of twentieth-century events on the development of IR.
- Halliday, F. *Rethinking international relations*. (London: MacMillan, 1994) [ISBN 9780333589052]. A concise, well-written, and thought provoking introduction to the study of IR, covering a broad range of approaches, debates, and historical events.

Please note that as long as you read the Essential reading you are then free to read around the subject area in any text, paper or online resource. You will need to support your learning by reading as widely as possible and by thinking about how these principles apply in the real world. To help you read extensively, you have free access to the VLE and University of London Online Library (see below).

Other useful texts for this course include:

### Books

- Adler, E. 'Condition(s) of peace' in Dunne, T., Cox, M. and Booth, K. *The Eighty Years' Crisis: international relations 1919–1999*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) [ISBN 9780521667838].
- Brown, C. 'Reimagining international society and global community' in Held, D. and A. McGrew *Globalization theory: approaches and controversies*. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007) [ISBN 9780745632117].
- Bull, H. 'War and international order' in Bull, H. *The anarchical society*. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002) third edition [ISBN 9780333985878].
- Buzan, B. and R. Little 'Beyond Westphalia? Capitalism after the "fall"' in Cox, M., K. Booth and T. Dunne *The Interregnum: controversies in world politics 1989–1999*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) [ISBN 9780521785099]. Note: this is the book form of a special issue of the *Review of International Studies* 25(5) 1999.
- Buzan, B. and R. Little 'Units in the modern international system' in Buzan, B. and R. Little *International systems in world history*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) [ISBN 9780198780656].

- Caballerro-Anthony, M. 'The new world of security: implications for human security and international security cooperation' in Beeson, M. and N. Bisley *Issues in 21st century world politics*. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010) [ISBN 9780230594524].
- Campbell, D. 'On dangers and their interpretation' in Campbell, D. *Writing security: United States foreign policy and the politics of identity*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998) [ISBN 9780816631445].
- Cox, M. 'Introduction' in Carr, E.H. *The Twenty Years' Crisis*. Edited by M. Cox. (New York: Palgrave, 2001) [ISBN 9780333963777].
- Darwin, J. 'The Eurasian revolution' in Darwin, J. *Tamerlane: the global history of empire*. (London: Penguin Books, 2007) [ISBN 9781596913936].
- Doyle, M. 'A more perfect union? The liberal peace and the challenge of globalization' in Booth, K. T. Dunne, and M. Cox *How might we live? Global ethics in the new century*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) [ISBN 9780521005203].
- Gellner, E. *Plough, book and sword: the structure of human history*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988) [ISBN 9780226287027].
- Griffiths, M. 'Introduction: conquest, coexistence and IR theory' in Griffiths, M. *Rethinking international relations theory*. (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2011) [ISBN 9780230217799].
- Halliday, Fred 'A necessary encounter: historical materialism and international relations' in Halliday, F. *Rethinking International Relations*. (London, MacMillan, 1994) [ISBN: 0774805080].
- Hammerstad, A. 'Population movement and its impact on world politics' in Beeson, M. and N. Bisley *Issues in 21st century world politics*. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010) [ISBN 9780230594524].
- Held, D. and A. McGrew 'Globalization and the end of the old order' in Cox, M., T. Dunne and K. Booth *Empires, systems and states: great transformations in international politics*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) [ISBN 9780521016865] Note: this is the book form of a special issue of the *Review of International Studies* 27(5) 2001.
- Higgott, R. 'Contested globalization: the changing context and normative challenges' in Booth, K., T. Dunne and M. Cox *How might we live? Global ethics in the new century*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) [ISBN 9780521005203].
- Higgott, R. 'Governing the global economy: multilateral economic institutions' in Beeson, M. and N. Bisley *Issues in 21st century world politics*. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010) [ISBN 9780230594524].
- Holsti, K.J. 'Scholarship in an era of anxiety: the study of international politics during the Cold War' in Dunne, T., M. Cox and K. Booth *The Eighty Years' Crisis: international relations 1919–1999*. (Cambridge University Press, 1998) [ISBN 9780521667838].
- Krasner, S. 'Rethinking the sovereign state model' in Cox, M., T. Dunne and K. Booth *Empires, systems and states*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) [ISBN 9780521016865] Note: this is the book form of a special issue of the *Review of International Studies* 27(5) 2001.
- Krasner, S. *Sovereignty: organized hypocrisy*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999) [ISBN 9780691007113]. Note: especially Chapter 1, pp.3–42.
- McNeill, W.H. *The rise of the West: a history of the human community*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992) [ISBN 9780226561417].
- Meadwell, H. 'The long nineteenth century in Europe: reinterpreting the concert system' in Cox, M., Dunne, T. and Booth, K. *Empires, systems and states: great transformations in international politics*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) [ISBN 9780521016865]. Note: this is the book form of a special issue of the *Review of International Studies* 27(5) 2001.
- Morris, I. 'The Western age' in Morris, I. *Why the West rules – for now: the patterns of history, and what they reveal about the future*. (London: Profile Books, 2011) [ISBN 9781846682087].

- Organski, A.E et al 'Power transition theory tested in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries' in Abdolohian M., C. Alsharabati, B. Efid et al. *Power transitions: strategies for the 21st century*. (Chatham House: Seven Bridges Press, 2000) [ISBN 9781889119434].
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## Online study resources

In addition to the subject guide and the Essential reading, it is crucial that you take advantage of the study resources that are available online for this course, including the VLE and the Online Library.

You can access the VLE, the Online Library and your University of London email account via the Student Portal at: <http://my.londoninternational.ac.uk>

You should have received your login details for the Student Portal with your official offer, which was emailed to the address that you gave on your application form. You have probably already logged in to the Student Portal in order to register! As soon as you registered, you will automatically have been granted access to the VLE, Online Library and your fully functional University of London email account.

If you forget your login details at any point, please email [uolia.support@london.ac.uk](mailto:uolia.support@london.ac.uk) quoting your student number.

### Making use of the Online Library

The Online Library contains a huge array of journal articles and other resources to help you read widely and extensively.

To access the majority of resources via the Online Library you will either need to use your University of London Student Portal login details, or you will be required to register and use an Athens login:  
<http://tinyurl.com/ollathens>

The easiest way to locate relevant content and journal articles in the Online Library is to use the **Summon** search engine.

If you are having trouble finding an article listed in a reading list, try removing any punctuation from the title, such as single quotation marks, question marks and colons.

For further advice, please see the online help pages:  
[www.external.shl.lon.ac.uk/summon/about.php](http://www.external.shl.lon.ac.uk/summon/about.php)

### The virtual learning environment

The VLE, which complements this subject guide, has been designed to enhance your learning experience, providing additional support and a sense of community. It forms an important part of your study experience with the University of London and you should access it regularly.

The VLE provides a range of resources for EMFSS courses:

- Self-testing activities: Doing these allows you to test your own understanding of subject material.
- Electronic study materials: The printed materials that you receive from the University of London are available to download, including updated reading lists and references.

- Past examination papers and *Examiners' commentaries*: These provide advice on how each examination question might best be answered.
- A student discussion forum: This is an open space for you to discuss interests and experiences, seek support from your peers, work collaboratively to solve problems and discuss subject material.
- Videos: There are recorded academic introductions to the subject, interviews and debates and, for some courses, audio-visual tutorials and conclusions.
- Recorded lectures: For some courses, where appropriate, the sessions from previous years' Study Weekends have been recorded and made available.
- Study skills: Expert advice on preparing for examinations and developing your digital literacy skills.
- Feedback forms.

Some of these resources are available for certain courses only, but we are expanding our provision all the time and you should check the VLE regularly for updates.

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## Examination advice

**Important:** the information and advice given here are based on the examination structure used at the time this guide was written. Please note that subject guides may be used for several years. Because of this we strongly advise you to always check both the current *Regulations* for relevant information about the examination, and the VLE where you should be advised of any forthcoming changes. You should also carefully check the rubric/instructions on the paper you actually sit and follow those instructions.

Over the course of three hours, students must answer any four of the 12 essay questions provided. These cover the main topics in this syllabus, and test your ability to apply the theories and concepts of IR to a range of historical and policy-based questions. All answers should be written in the form of an essay, with a thesis statement and supporting evidence organised in a series of paragraphs that support your conclusions.

As you will learn throughout this course, there are very rarely any definitive answers in IR. Theories, concepts, history and policy are contested by students, professors and practitioners alike. As indicated in the examination preparation material on the VLE, Examiners look for well-crafted arguments that use conceptual tools to understand and analyse real-world events.

Before sitting your examination, be sure that you have worked through every chapter of this subject guide. You must be familiar with the Essential readings for each chapter. These can be supplemented with material from the Further readings, various printed media and other literary sources. A Sample examination paper and commentary are included at the end of this guide.

Remember, it is important to check the VLE for:

- up-to-date information on examination and assessment arrangements for this course
- where available, past examination papers and *Examiners' commentaries* for the course which give advice on how each question might best be answered.

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## Part 1: Introduction

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## Notes

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# Chapter 1: The twentieth century origins of international relations

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The armistices has been signed and the statesmen of the nations will soon assemble to undertake the task of concluding the pact of Peace which we all hope will herald in a new world, freed from the menace of war... Old problems must be confronted in a new spirit; insular and vested prejudices must be removed; understanding and toleration need to be greatly developed. It is an immense task and a myriad of agencies will be required to discharge it. Among these must be our universities...

*Major David Davies, MP, in a letter to Sir John Williams, President of the University College of Wales, Aberystwyth, donating £20,000 for the establishment of the Wilson Chair in International Politics, 1920*

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## Aim of the chapter

The aim of this chapter is to:

- introduce you to the main background factors that led to the creation and evolution of IR as an academic discipline.

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## Learning outcomes

By the end of this chapter, and having completed the Essential reading and activities, you should be able to:

- discuss what is meant by the 'twenty years' crisis'
- describe the influence of twentieth-century crises on the development of IR
- illustrate some of the fundamental differences between Realist, Liberal, English School and Postcolonial approaches to IR
- discuss the subjects with which IR should be concerned
- define the vocabulary terms in **bold**.

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## Essential reading

Baylis, J., S. Smith and P. Owens 'Introduction'.

Cox, M. 'From the Cold War to the world economic crisis'.

Scott, L. 'International history 1900–1999'.

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## Further reading

Ashworth, L. 'Did the Realist-Idealist debate ever take place?: a revisionist history of international relations', *International Relations* 16(1) 2002, pp.33–51.

Buzan, B. and R. Little 'Why international relations has failed as an intellectual project and what to do about it', *Millennium* 30(1) 2001, pp.19–39.

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## Introduction

Although IR is a relatively young discipline, less than a century old, many of its most important questions and concepts have deep roots in intellectual history. From Classical Greece to the British Empire, Ming China to modern America, leaders, advisers, academics and students have wrestled with problems of war, trade, culture and diplomacy. This is not to say, however, that there is nothing new under the sun. Even those who insist that the problems we face are more or less the same as those of the ancients, recognise that the world has changed dramatically in terms of its economic development, military technologies and rise of political democracy. IR – whose ambitious goal is to understand the complex network of social, economic and political interactions that connect human societies – is a contradictory subject. Its first academic chair was

established in the early twentieth century, many years after other social sciences, yet its fundamental questions are as old as any. IR deals with the best and the worst of humanity: respect and hatred, cooperation and war.

These are not new debates. Look at any standard history of IR and you can trace them through the idea of past 'greats': writers like Thucydides (a Greek historian of the fifth century BC), St Thomas Aquinas (a thirteenth-century Christian theologian), Hugo Grotius (a seventeenth-century Dutch lawyer), Jean-Jacques Rousseau (an eighteenth-century French philosopher) and Immanuel Kant (a German thinker writing in the shadow of the Napoleonic wars). Though none of these men thought of themselves as working in a subject called IR, each contributed to our understanding of topics that have since become associated with the discipline: the causes for war, the possibilities of peace, and the impact of trade and ideas. Their works are the intellectual foundations upon which much of modern IR is constructed.

## The origins of international relations: the First World War and the interwar years

Despite its deep intellectual roots, IR is a young discipline. For some time, scholars have been discussing who first taught IR, where and for what precise purpose. There is general agreement that its institutional growth in Western universities – notably British and American – is a twentieth-century phenomenon directly connected to the simple and terrible fact that between 1914 and 1989 the world experienced three terrible and protracted conflicts: the First World War, the Second World War and the Cold War. These took tens of millions of lives, led to revolutionary social transformations around the world, nearly eliminated whole human populations, facilitated the rise of some great powers, and led to the demise of others. The hugely destructive wars of this 'bloodiest era in history' have been at the heart of IR since it first emerged as a taught subject after 1918.

**Stop and read sections 1 and 2 of Chapter 3, pp.52–54**

### Activity

Complete the table below by listing events from the twentieth century that have influenced the development of key topics in IR. This list will be useful when you prepare essays and examination answers to questions on these topics.

IR topic	Associated historical events
Human rights	(Example: the Holocaust)
Causes of war	
Role of economics in IR	
Conditions for peace	

If war gave birth to academic IR, the establishment of peace was its first mission. IR is sometimes thought of as being too pessimistic in its views on war and peace, and too theoretical in its approach to global issues. However, many of its key thinkers have been practical people keen to discover tangible and morally acceptable solutions to real world problems.

When David Davies, a survivor of the Western Front in the First World War, funded the first permanent academic post in IR in the small Welsh seaside town of Aberystwyth in 1920, he made it clear that the position was not to be used for vague theorising. Rather, it was to help scholars engage in practical thinking that would 'herald in a new world freed from the menace of war'.

As we know, Davies' dream of peace was not realised. The end of 'the war to end all wars' in 1918 did not lay the foundations for a more stable world based on mutually-agreed rules and international organisations like the League of Nations. This had been the hope of IR's earliest dedicated specialists, the intellectual forerunners of today's Liberals. Instead, the post-First World War settlement led to what E.H. Carr, one of the most influential writers in the discipline, later called the **twenty years' crisis**. He argued that the settlement contained within it the seeds for an even greater conflict. He was especially critical of the idealistic US President Woodrow Wilson. Carr saw powerful **revisionist states**, dissatisfied with the **status quo** created after the Great War, pushing hard to shift the **balance of power** in their favour. As a seasoned British diplomat, and later as an influential academic, Carr hoped that German and Japanese ambitions might be contained through a strategy of diplomatic concession. The status quo, he argued, was not sacrosanct, and 'peaceful change' was preferable to war. In the end, Carr's policy options proved to be unworkable. Germany and Japan could not be satisfied through **appeasement** as he had hoped. Their policies of conquest and expansion continued, drawing Britain and France (in September 1939), the USSR (in June 1941) and the USA (in December 1941) into the most destructive war in history.

### The post-1945 world: American hegemony and European decline

The Second World War compelled writers and statesmen to think with greater urgency about the kind of world that had produced such appalling aggression. It also forced policy-makers to seriously think about how such disastrous events might be avoided once the war came to an end. Though neither question ever saw a consensus, these turbulent times generated an enormous amount of creative thought. Among Western powers at least, several important lessons were learnt. First, that global security would never be achieved so long as the international economy did not function properly. Second, there was a need to construct some kind of reformed League of Nations, the **United Nations (UN)**, within which the **great powers** would be given a special role and special responsibilities for maintaining international peace and security, leading to the creation of the **permanent five (P5)** within the **UN Security Council**. Lastly, it was believed that the USA could not retreat into political **isolationism**, as it had done following the First World War, but that it needed to remain actively engaged in international affairs as Europe's international influence waned.

The chances of a return to the pre-war status quo were very slim. America's deepening involvement and increased influence effectively ruled out any rerun of what had happened in 1919 and 1920. Indeed, the USA had become so powerful by 1945 that it would not have been feasible for it to have 'retreated'. This is rarely, if ever, what rising powers do, and it was certainly no longer an option. Later in this course we will discuss the notion of power and America's use of it. Here, we only need make passing reference to how much of this extraordinarily important commodity the USA possessed when the guns fell silent in 1945. Never had the world witnessed such a phenomenon. By 1945, every other great power – winners and losers alike – was in a state of severe disrepair, barely able to recover from a war

that had left their societies in ruins. This included the USSR, which had lost over 25 million of its citizens. The USA, meanwhile, had never been in better economic and military health, accounting for nearly 60% of the world's economic wealth, over 50% of its research and development, 70% of its naval tonnage, and the lion's share of its agricultural surpluses. The age of the **superpower** had begun.

Even as the Second World War came to an end, analysts of international politics were aware that a huge power shift was underway; one that pointed towards the emergence of what IR would later define as a two power, bipolar system. Bipolarity describes a distribution of power among two great powers in the international system, and can be contrasted with **unipolarity** – with a single dominant great power – and **multipolarity** – in which capabilities are divided among many great powers. Moreover, this emerging world order would be dominated not by European empires – still in possession of considerable assets in 1945 – but by the United States of America and, later, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. By 1945, military planners in Washington DC were already wondering who the next enemy might be. Europe's imperial power, dominant prior to the First World War, was seen to be in decline. As the colonial empires of the UK, France, Portugal and other European powers disintegrated, the USA saw a need to establish new forms of economic and political **hegemony**. Such was American self-confidence in the period that many of its policy-makers discounted any threat from the USSR, which had been economically weakened by its brutal three year war of extermination with Germany and confronted by the atomic bomb. There was, at first, little indication of the 'great contest' that was to follow.

#### Stop and read section 3 of Chapter 3, pp.54–56

1. Which came first, the decline of European power in the international system, or the independence of its colonies around the world?
2. Did the decline of European imperialism mark an end to all forms of hegemony in the international system? If not, what new forms took its place?

### The Cold War and the birth of Realism

As we now know, the high hopes born out of the US sense of its own 'preponderance of power' in 1945 were not realised. Very quickly, deep differences over the future shape of Europe, the status of Germany, the situation in China and even the future of capitalism divided the victorious allies. The origins of the ensuing 45-year long **Cold War** have been hotly debated. Some blame Soviet expansionism for causing the rift, others the political and economic policies of the USA. The Cold War has also been viewed as a natural consequence of competition between the two superpowers and their opposing ideologies, with the USA and its allies devoted to capitalist principles, while the Soviets and their allies were wedded to their vision of state socialism.

#### Stop and read sections 4 and 5 of Chapter 3, pp.56–63

##### Activity

In no more than 500 words, respond to the question below. Your answer should include a one-sentence thesis statement that clearly states your position, followed by the main points on which you base that position:

To what extent were the Soviet and American blocs during the Cold War similar to the empires of European states prior to the Second World War? What made them similar and different?

IR scholars have been central to discussions about the causes and consequences of the Cold War. Then and now, many believe that the wartime alliance between the West and the USSR was bound to fail, not just because of the Allies' political and economic differences, but because that is the fate of alliances once unifying threats – in this case Nazi Germany and imperial Japan – were overcome. Furthermore, while both sides in the Cold War exaggerated the aggressive intentions of their opponent, the fact remains that the larger international system was in turmoil after the Second World War. Insecurity was the order of the day. Nowhere was this more visible than in post-war Europe, where economic recovery was proving difficult and the pre-war balance of power had been overturned by the defeat of Germany and the enormous territorial gains made by the USSR. Even if the USSR had no plans to invade Western Europe – and there is little evidence indicating that it did – there was every need to restore the health of European economies and the political self-confidence of individual states. Many Western policy-makers saw no reason to trust their Soviet counterparts. The USSR's repressive actions in Eastern Europe, its construction of a sphere of influence, its links with increasingly influential communist parties in Italy and France, its closed economy, and its brutal policies at home were seen as ample evidence that cooperation would be impossible. This was certainly the view held by the USA and the UK by 1946, and by early 1947 the idea was truly embedded.

The outcome of this process led to what British writer George Orwell (1945) and American columnist Walter Lippmann (1947) called a 'Cold War'. This very new kind of war would be conducted in a **bipolar** world where power was polarised in the hands of two nuclear-armed superpowers. First Europe and later many other regions of the world divided into blocs, one pro-Soviet and one pro-American. The Cold War was to have all the features of a normal war except – it was hoped – for direct military confrontation. Unsurprisingly, this state of affairs had a profound impact on the way an emerging generation of increasingly American IR scholars thought about IR. These rising thinkers saw themselves living in dark and dangerous times, making them extraordinarily tough minded. The vast majority of them continued to believe that diplomacy and cooperation were possible, even essential, in a nuclear age. Nevertheless, most were decidedly pessimistic. Having witnessed the outbreak of two global wars, one world depression, the rise of fascism and a confrontation with an expanded communist threat – often equated with fascism in official US minds – many analysts of world politics came to look at the world through a particularly dark prism born of harsh experience.

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## Your first international relations theory: Realism

Stop and read 'Realism and world politics' in the Introduction, p.4

### Activity

Note down the main assumptions that Realism uses to understand the world around it. Pay special attention to who is considered an international actor, why they act the way they do, and what kind of international system they inhabit.

The hugely influential American writer Hans J. Morgenthau, himself a Jewish exile from Nazi Germany, set the tone for this kind of thinking in his highly influential textbook *Politics among nations* (1948). Morgenthau was neither a natural conservative, nor uncritical of US foreign policy. As one keen on speaking 'truth to power' as he once put it, he had no time for

wishful thinking. Lessons had to be learned, and if history taught anything it was not that we could build a better world based on new principles – as interwar Liberals had suggested prior to the Second World War. Rather, Morgenthau believed that we should be trying to build a more orderly world by learning from the past. This distinction between building a better world and a more orderly one continues to separate Liberals and Realists to this day. The past taught Morgenthau:

- that **states** were driven by deep power ambitions
- that these drives were permanent features of IR
- that it was the international responsibility of the USA – as the most powerful democracy after the Second World War – to act as a great and responsible power, especially once confronted by a powerful Soviet adversary.

To be fair, Morgenthau never thought that the USSR was driven by great ideological ambitions. However, he pointed out that it controlled a land mass stretching across 11 time zones, had a formidable army that had just defeated Nazi Germany, and was bound to want to convert this power into greater global influence. As a result, Morgenthau argued that the USA had to pursue what one of his fellow Americans – the policy-maker George F. Kennan – termed a long-term and patient **containment** of Soviet ambitions. In this way, some form of stability could be restored to the world. States might one day learn to work with each other but, for Morgenthau and Kennan, that day lay in the distant future. For the time being, it was better to plan for the worst case scenario on the assumption that by doing so the worse might never come to pass.

This no-nonsense way of thinking about the world seemed logical and sensible, and called itself **Realism** – surely one of the most effective branding exercises in the social sciences. Within the Realist framework there was room for disagreement. Some Realists did not think that the Cold War could remain 'cold' forever, and would inevitably end in a nuclear war if it went on for any length of time. Others arrived at another, equally erroneous, conclusion: that the confrontation would never end at all! For many, what began as a dangerous global competition gradually evolved into what the structural Realist Kenneth Waltz regarded as an essential stabilising element in the anarchic international system. Two superpowers, he argues, were better than one hegemon or many great powers in terms of creating a balanced international situation. The Cold War simplified world politics and, in doing so, made it far more predictable. Waltz concludes that in an international system without a supreme ruler – an **anarchic international system** – the see-saw of Cold War bipolarity was responsible for bringing some order to relations between the superpowers. Waltz is not alone in this view. Another American writer, the influential historian John Gaddis, argued in 1987 that the Cold War was a new form of 'long peace'; underwritten by the reality of nuclear mutually assured destruction (MAD), and supported by two rationally constrained superpowers whose passing would probably destabilise the international system they dominated. Remember, this was before the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and disintegration of the Soviet Union two years later.

## Growing diversity in IR

Stop and read from the beginning of 'Liberalism and world politics' (p.4) to the end of 'Postcolonialism' (p.6) in Chapter 1

### Activity

Using the list of Realist assumptions that you created in the last activity, draw up a parallel list of assumptions for each of the alternative theories on pp.4–6. Remember to think about key questions:

- Who acts?
- Why do they act?
- What kind of system shapes their actions?

Though Realism is normally identified as the dominant tradition in IR, it has never held the field alone. Depending on how you date it, **Liberalism** predates Realism – dating back to the much-derided idealism of the interwar years – and remains one of the discipline's most influential approaches. For Liberals, **interdependence** – mutual dependence on one another for social and material goods – provides the best foundations on which we can build a more peaceful world. According to supporters of Liberalism like Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye, the extraordinary expansion of 'trans-boundary interactions' since the end of the Second World War is the most obvious foundation on which to build a new international system in a post-hegemonic age. Increasing interdependence, they argue, means that states are not absolutely sovereign insofar as they remain vulnerable to **transnational** forces. This is not to deny the continued importance of the state and power in IR. However, in a world in which the USA appears to be losing its capacity to lead from a position of hegemonic strength, Liberals argue that additional means must be sought to guarantee the stability and improvement of the international system. Their analysis, therefore, includes an expanded set of international actors, focusing also on the role of multinational corporations (MNCs), non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and intergovernmental organisations (IGOs).

Another distinct contribution to IR has been made by the **English School** (ES), first developed at the London School of Economics and Political Science. Many of its theorists accept a good deal of what Realists have to say about power and the competitive, anarchic character of IR. At the same time, they disagree with Realism's claim that the international system is a free-for-all, 'anything goes' arena. Realism, argues the ES, cannot explain why states – even ones as hostile to each other as the USA and the USSR – work together, engage in diplomacy, and thereby generate forms of international order in an otherwise anarchic system. Instead of accepting Realism's Hobbesian view of IR, the ES argues that the international system is best described as an **international society**, in which actors (including states, MNCs, NGOs, etc.) are bound together by socially-generated practices and principles. These practices and principles – which some ES scholars call **institutions** – range from bilateral and multilateral treaties (the formal institutions of international society) to unwritten but influential principles such as sovereignty and democracy promotion (society's informal institutions). Both are historically changeable, varying over time and space. In the past 50 years, European international society has gone from being one of the world's most unstable and war-torn regions to one of its most tranquil. Its institutions have evolved over time away from the use of force as a legitimate means of

conflict resolution. This does not mean that war in Europe is impossible, but only that it is made less likely as an alternative means of conflict resolution – mainly via the European Union (EU) – become available and accepted. We will discuss the English School's institutions at greater length later in this guide. For now, it should suffice to note that whereas Realism sees IR as conflictual and Liberalism sees it as cooperative, the ES leaves the answer open. International societies can be cooperative or conflictual, depending on when and where you look. Furthermore, institutions evolve over time, changing the character of the international societies that they describe. Analysing the character and evolution of international institutions therefore remains the main object of ES research.

As the Cold War progressed, issues arose for which Realists and Liberals had few answers. In the 1960s, a new generation of **critical theorists** began to question global power structures rather than merely taking them for granted. Few of these thinkers traced their intellectual roots directly back to IR. The overwhelming majority were either historians of US diplomatic history dissatisfied with standard accounts of American conduct abroad, or radical economists with an interest in the Third World and its discontents. Through the efforts of these thinkers, critical theories born in other branches of the social sciences began to have a major impact on the generation of IR scholars who entered the field in ever-larger numbers. This includes Marxism, with its class-based analysis of global economics, Social Constructivism, with its focus on humans' ability to consciously alter the principles by which the world operates, Post-structuralism, which denies the existence of any absolute Truths on which to base analyses of human action, and Post-colonialism, which traces the international system's social, economic, and political foundations back to its colonial – and ultimately European – roots.

In a related development, the 1970s saw an upsurge of interest in what became known as **International Political Economy (IPE)**. This branch of IR seeks to explain links between the international economic and political systems. The collapse of the post-Second World War Bretton Woods economic system in 1971, perceptions of relative US economic decline, and a general recognition that one could not understand IR without at least having some knowledge of the material world forced some in IR to come to terms with economics, a branch of knowledge of which they had hitherto been woefully ignorant. But even a little knowledge of international economics had its advantages. For, if the US was in decline – as some were already arguing in the 1970s – a new form of world order had to be forged.

These challenges to Realism have risen to greater prominence since the end of the Cold War in 1991. That said, Realism remains very much at the heart of the discipline, particularly in the USA where it originated. Other attempts to dethrone this academic heavyweight have met with only limited success. Moreover, even while Realism has come under increasing attack, the USA has become the uncontested centre of our academic discipline. Having found a new home after the Second World War, IR has remained what Stanley Hoffmann termed 'an American social science'. US resources, its ability to attract some of the best and the brightest from Europe and farther afield, and the appearance of having influence in the corridors of US power have made American IR look like an especially robust animal compared to its rivals elsewhere, making the USA an intellectual, if not political, hegemon.



## International relations and the end of the Cold War

Ultimately, it took a seismic event to produce a widespread change in IR. The end of the Cold War was an unexpected and almost entirely peaceful revolution in world politics. We will look at this event in more detail in Chapter 3. For the time being, however, we need to consider its impact on IR as an academic discourse.

Stop and read section two of Chapter 4, entitled  
'The end of the Cold War', pp.68–69

### Activity

Note down keywords in the reading that might indicate the author's theoretical position. Do you think he is a Realist, a Liberal, a member of the English School, a Marxist, or a student of IPE? List the terms and your answer in the space below.

The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 shattered the stability of the Cold War international system, plunging IR scholars into an intellectual crisis as they tried to come to terms with the end of bipolarity. Many began to question old certainties and think about the shape of the post-Cold War world. This led to a shift in IR's intellectual focus, away from what might be defined as 'classical' security issues (dealing with states, armies, diplomats and spies) towards a whole host of 'new' security issues associated with **globalisation**. These are qualitatively different from their classical and statist predecessors, and include issues such as human rights, crime, and the environment. It also reinforced a shift towards new kinds of theory and more issues relating to international ethics, some of which we will look at in Chapter 6.

To get a sense of this shift, it is worth comparing a standard IR textbook written during the Cold War with one produced after 1991. The former normally begins with a few well-chosen observations about the origins of Cold War following the Second World War, continues with a lengthy discourse on the foreign policies of the two superpowers, talks about key concepts, such as sovereignty and polarity, spends some time on the balance of power and the role of nuclear weapons, and probably concludes with a general discussion about why the world will not change much over the longer term. A textbook written after 1991, on the other hand, generally has very little to say about the Cold War except in an historical background context. Thus, the USSR and superpower rivalry will not be included (for obvious reasons), while new topics – globalisation, failed states, the role of religion, and non-state actors – give the subject a new feel. In some of the more theoretically daring studies authored after the Cold War, the focus has shifted away from the study of states and the notion of a well-structured international system whose laws can be discovered by careful analysis. Instead, many now emphasise the role of non-state actors and the apparent absence of a coherent international structure in the new, uncertain, post-modern world of the 1990s and early twenty-first century.

The other obvious change is to IR more broadly. After fighting for many years to get recognition as a subject in its own right – a fight it continues to wage in many countries in continental Europe – IR in an age of globalisation has become increasingly popular with students in the twenty-first century. It is not clear whether this is because the end of the Cold War brought increasing opportunities for travel, greater international contact between academics and students, or because it brought a growing recognition that what happens in one part of the international system is bound to impact on every other part. Whatever the reason, there is little doubting the growth of the discipline. IR in the twenty-first century, with its many world-class departments, recognised international associations, plethora of journals, global league tables, and intellectual superstars, has never looked in better shape. In many universities today, we see that traditional subjects like political science – which normally studies ‘domestic’ affairs – are experiencing tough times. Meanwhile, IR – which looks at the state of the world today – is on the rise.

One thing, however, remains unchanged. Academic IR still revolves around an American axis. Interest in the USA as the last superpower remains high, and American scholars continue to exert an enormous – some would say disproportionate – influence on the field. Of course, one should not exaggerate. Other centres of IR – in the UK, Scandinavia and Germany – have made their presence felt. Moreover, there is a rising number of major powers in the world for scholars to consider, including the EU – a focus of much lively discussion since the 1990s – and China – forever on the rise. But because of its staying power and its position at the heart of the international system, the USA continues to demand everybody’s attention. Whether this interest, sometimes bordering on the obsessive, is likely to go on forever is not entirely certain. Ultimately, it will depend on many factors, the most fundamental being America’s power in the world, an issue to which we shall return later in the concluding section of this course. However, as the first decade of the twenty-first century has given way to the second, the USA and its academics have continued to exert a powerful pull on all those around them.

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### Activity

Place the appropriate letter (a-d) in front of the theory that corresponds to each of the following descriptions of the Cold War:

\_\_\_Realism \_\_\_Liberalism \_\_\_The English School \_\_\_Marxism

- a. The Cold War was a competition between US and Soviet institutions, with each side trying to make their preferred behaviours and norms the accepted bases of international society.
- b. The Cold War was the result of insufficient interdependence between post-war US and Soviet spheres of influence.
- c. The Cold War was an expression of the deep power ambitions that continue to define competition between states in the anarchic international system.
- d. The Cold War was a means by which dominant socioeconomic classes imposed their economic and political dominance on less economically developed groups around the world.

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## A reminder of your learning outcomes

Having completed this chapter, and the Essential reading and activities, you should be able to:

- discuss what is meant by the 'twenty years' crisis'
  - describe the influence of twentieth-century crises on the development of IR
  - illustrate some of the fundamental differences between Realist, Liberal, English School and Postcolonial approaches to IR
  - discuss the subjects with which IR should be concerned
  - define the vocabulary terms in **bold**.
- 

## Chapter vocabulary

anarchic international system	international society
appeasement	isolationism
balance of power	Liberalism
bipolar	multipolarity
Cold War	permanent five (P5)
containment	Realism
critical theorists	revisionist states
English School	Security Council
globalisation	states
great powers	status quo
hegemony	superpower
institutions	transnational
interdependence	twenty years' crisis
International Political Economy (IPE)	United Nations (UN)
	unipolarity

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## Sample examination questions

1. Why has IR been dominated by Realist ways of thinking about the international system since the end of the Second World War?
2. What are the main challenges to Realism?
3. In what sense was the Cold War a 'long peace'?
4. What is the proper subject matter of IR?

After preparing your answers, refer to the *Examiners' commentaries* on the VLE for targeted feedback on specific questions.

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## Part 2: Foundations

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## Notes

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## Chapter 2: Europe and the emergence of international society

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By 1900 the peoples of Europe and European stock overseas dominated the globe. They did so in many ways, some explicit and some implicit, but the qualifications matter less than the general fact...This was a unique development in world history. For the first time, one civilization established itself as a leader worldwide.

*Roberts, J.M. The Penguin history of the world.  
(London: Penguin, 2007) [ISBN 9780141030425]. p.789.*

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### Aims of the chapter

The aims of this chapter are to:

- introduce you to the importance of international history for the study of IR
- show how IR can be employed to make sense of the past
- critically assess Europe's impact on the rest of the world.

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### Learning outcomes

By the end of this chapter, and having completed the Essential reading and activities, you should be able to:

- explain some of the reasons why Europe emerged as the main driver of world politics by the end of the nineteenth century
- discuss competing explanations of the 'Long Peace' in Europe between 1814 and 1914
- evaluate different explanations of the causes of the First World War
- assess the impact of the First World War on IR in the twentieth century
- define the vocabulary terms in **bold**.

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### Essential reading

Armstrong, D. 'The evolution of international society'.

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### Further reading

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## Introduction

As discussed in Chapter 1, the years between 1914 and 1991 were disturbed, even 'dark', ones that had a very marked impact on the way in which IR developed as an academic subject. But how did the international system arrive at that point? Was it an inevitable outcome of historical events? And what forces produced an international system that, by the outbreak of the First World War, was dominated by Europe and Europeans?

In this chapter, we will try to answer some of these questions by looking at the history of IR – a branch of history called **international history (IH)**. We will not be able to cover the whole of IH in one chapter. Nor do we need to. Instead, we will focus on a few specific instances that will inform your understanding of current events. It is vitally important to look at the present through the prism of the past. This is partly because we need to understand the deeper sources of what became the extended crisis of the twentieth century, and partly to alert students of world politics to something they should never lose sight of: although nothing stays the same forever, some of the key problems in world politics have remained remarkably durable.

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## Rethinking the 'international': the English School and international history

Stop and read section 1 of Chapter 2, pp.36–37

What distinguishes the English School's approach to IR from that of the Realist approach?

Before looking at a few events from international history, we first need to think about the notion of the international itself. At what point in time – and where – did 'the international' actually emerge as a way of thinking about a specific kind of relationship? There are two rather different answers to this fundamental question.

The first, more traditional response argues that it is impossible to conceive of something called 'the international' without there being something national against which to define it. Both terms are therefore intimately connected to ideas of the **nation** and the **state**. According to this line of historical reasoning, we can only begin to think of the international – and IR – after the rise of sovereign states in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Europe. According to this definition, the international can therefore be understood as a description of the **state system**, first developed in post-Reformation Europe, inhabited by autonomous political units, and organised according to a collection of shared principles and practices such as sovereignty and non-intervention. These principles and practices – known as **institutions** by members of the ES – bring some level of order to IR in what is otherwise an anarchic system. This institutional order, based on shared principles and practices, is what Hedley Bull refers to as **international society**.

As we will see later, this view of international history has much to recommend it. However, we need to be sensitive to the fact that other forms of interaction and exchange existed between all sorts of political, social and economic groups – tribes, clans, ethnic groups and cities – long before the fifteenth century and well outside the boundaries of Europe. Complex systems of interacting groups developed as far apart geographically as imperial China (a civilisation stretching back 5,000 years), the Middle East (whose civilisations stretch back even further), and Africa (the most likely cradle of our species). If we accept orthodox wisdom that homo sapiens came 'out of Africa' more than 100,000 years ago, we might argue that something loosely defined as IR developed between small human bands when our ancestors first decided to migrate across Africa, Eurasia and, subsequently, the planet.

International relations did not emerge, fully-grown, with the birth of the modern European state system around in the sixteenth century. States – as we shall argue throughout this course – are crucial to explaining much of what has happened in world politics for the last 500 years. However, world history clearly shows that, for many centuries, it was not sovereign states that engaged in diplomacy, warfare and economic exchange. Rather, this role was often filled by great **empires** like the Egyptian, the Persian, the Roman, the Mongol, and even the Mayan and the Aztec. In fact, the more we discover about these empires' complex histories, the more we notice how late in the day states actually emerged as serious players on the world stage. Moreover, when states did finally emerge out of the shadow of these empires, they did so with the help of those who had gone before; not just from the Greeks and the Romans, but also from many parts of the non-Christian world. Islam, in particular, has played a crucial role in the rise of Europe's state system – both negatively by threatening it and positively by preserving and translating the learning of the ancient world that formed the basis for the European Renaissance following the medieval period.

#### Stop and read sections 2 and 3 of Chapter 2, pp.37–41

##### Activity

Each of the international societies described in these readings – Greek, Indian, Chinese, Roman, Christian and Islamic – include a set of institutions that define who can act legitimately in international society and how these actors are supposed to behave. Follow the example as you complete the table below to keep track of these societies' different international institutions. Make a special note of institutions that develop in a number of different international societies.



International society	Institutions of international society
Greek	<b>Who?</b> City-states, Oracles <b>How?</b> Arbitration, Diplomacy (proxenia), Rules of War, Sanctity of Treaties
Indian	
Chinese	
Roman	
Christian	
Islamic	

## European expansion

We should be more than a little critical of the ways in which some writers have traditionally thought about IR: largely through European eyes, and mainly as something that only became seriously interesting when states emerged as the main actor in world affairs. IR does not begin and end with the rise of European states. Students of world politics must nevertheless confront an incontrovertible fact: that at some point between the late fourteenth and the sixteenth centuries, Europe – initially around the Mediterranean and later in states bordering the Atlantic (Portugal, Spain, the UK, Holland and France) – began to evolve in ways that changed the course of European and world history. In a very important sense, there was no such thing as a truly interconnected world before 1500. Only after the period of European exploration and expansion beginning at the turn of the sixteenth century can we begin to conceive of such an entity emerging. As one of the great historians of world history, J.M. Roberts, has argued, the age of a true world history – and by implication the history of global IR – starts in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and continues for another 400 years, by which time European domination of the globe was complete.

The sources of this dynamic expansion have been hotly debated. Some explanations are technical: from Europe's medieval agricultural revolution, to the advances made in learning during the Renaissance, to technological improvements that made oceanic shipping safer and their captains better able to navigate. Some have suggested a more economic reason: the rise of **capitalism**. According to this thesis, it was no coincidence that as **feudalism** began to break down and capitalism began to rise in its wake across Western Europe, it was this region – rather than China or the Islamic world – that broke free from the pack and pushed outwards in an extraordinary bout of expansion. Debates about the driving force behind the rise of the West will, no doubt, continue. Of one thing we can be certain: whether for cultural, religious, political or economic reasons (or some combination of all four), the states of Western Europe no longer simply waited for things to happen to them. Instead, they went out to make things happen to others.

The consequences for the world were immense. Not only did imperial expansion make European states rich, it also made their citizens feel distinctly – one might say ‘naturally’ – superior to everybody else. It spawned a vast commerce in African slaves that spelled disaster for millions and created vast fortunes for the few who lived and prospered from the unpaid labour of others. Like many of the historical processes that came before it, Europe’s expansion simultaneously created wealth, poverty, technological progress and moral barbarity. It fostered invention and innovation, revolutionised communication, gave birth to modern geography and cartography – in fact to much of modern science itself. Its consequences were certainly not neutral from the point of view of global relationships. In terms of the distribution of power, it reinforced existing global inequalities. The world was both made and then refashioned by the European powers, primarily for economic gain though justified on grounds that made European conquest sound – at least to most Europeans – enlightened (in terms of raising the level of the ‘natives’), religiously necessary (spreading Christianity) or racially preordained (with ‘inferior’ races being destined to be ruled by those of the supposedly ‘superior’ white variety). Significantly, few Europeans of the day opposed expansion and colonialism. Even liberals and more than a few socialists were counted among their supporters, arguing well into the early part of the twentieth century that there was something distinctively progressive about an economically and culturally superior Europe helping those less fortunate to join the modern world.

## European hegemony

### Stop and read section 4 of Chapter 2, pp.41–45

According to Hedley Bull in *The anarchical society*, international societies require agreement on three fundamental principles in order to operate effectively:

1. a means of formal communication between parties
2. a means of enforcing agreements between parties
3. a means of recognising one another’s property rights.<sup>1</sup>

As you read the assigned pages of the textbook, use the table below to note down institutions that fulfilled these roles at various points in the emergence of modern international society.

	Historical institutions
Communication	
Enforcement	
Property rights	

<sup>1</sup> Bull, H. *The anarchical society: a study of order in world politics*. (London: MacMillan, 1995) second edition [ISBN 9780333638224] pp.4–5.

The assault on the world by Europe’s rising states had, by the late nineteenth century, created European world **hegemony**, albeit a contested one. There was opposition – first when the 13 American colonies defeated and expelled the British Empire in the late eighteenth century, and again when many of the nations of Latin America expelled the Spanish and the Portuguese empires in the nineteenth century. However,

these challenges did not upset Europe's dominance. The USA made its revolution in the name of European (even English) ideals, and thereafter only welcomed immigrants from Europe into the 'New World'. Meanwhile, in Latin America, liberation from Spain and Portugal did not lead to the end of Europe's influence over the continent. Indeed, its revolutions left the old European ruling class intact and states such as the USA and the UK more deeply involved in Latin American affairs than they had been before the expulsion of Iberian power.

Dynamic expansion made Europe the centre of a world. This revolutionary transformation – like any great revolutionary transformation – did not occur without a great deal of organised violence, initially directed against those who were being subjected to European rule and then against competing European powers. Spain and Portugal may have been able to come to a 'gentleman's agreement' over the distribution of colonial possessions in the Treaty of Tordesillas (1494), but no such agreement seemed possible elsewhere. Indeed, from the sixteenth century onwards, the Europeans fought a series of bitter and prolonged wars to see who would, in the end, get the lion's share of these spoils. Great Britain and Spain, for instance, were bitter enemies throughout the sixteenth century. Their long war, which concluded rather dramatically with the destruction of the Spanish Armada in 1588, was followed by struggle between the Dutch and the English. This only ended when the Dutch Stadtholder – at that time the Netherlands' head of state – ascended to the British throne in 1688 as King William III. The Anglo-Dutch commercial conflict was overtaken in the eighteenth century by a long struggle between Great Britain and France. This struggle continued on and off for just under a century, was fought across three continents, and only came to a close after their extended struggle for European (and thus world) domination ended with the defeat of Napoleonic France at the hands of a grand coalition – comprising Russia, Prussia, Austria-Hungary and Great Britain – in 1814.

### Activity

It has been argued that European imperialism led to two distinct international societies: one within Europe and the other covering the rest of the world. Complete the table below thinking about how international institutions differed when applied **inside** and **outside** of Europe during the era of European imperialism.

Social function	Institutions among European states	Institutions between European and non-European actors
Communication	Diplomacy	
Enforcement	Treaty making, war	
Property	Mutual non-intervention, sovereignty	

## From the Long Peace to the Great War

This extended period of competition to determine the dominant actor in world politics, stretching from around 1500 to 1814, continues to exercise a great deal of fascination for IR scholars. We might argue that some of the discipline's key concepts such as the balance of power – not to mention

its preoccupation with war and its interest in diplomacy – derive from this extraordinarily turbulent period. Following 1814, however, something equally extraordinary occurred: a form of ‘great power’ peace broke out and lasted – with only a few interruptions – until the outbreak of the First World War in 1914. Different explanations have been advanced to explain this period, often referred to as the **Long Peace**. These have ranged from the diplomatic efforts put in by the major powers at the peace conference at the Congress of Vienna; through war weariness (a believable hypothesis given that at least five million died across Europe between 1789 and 1814); to the notion that, whatever else might have divided them, the major powers after 1814 shared some common values and interests that drove them to resolve most of their differences through diplomacy rather than costly wars.

Others have tried to apply the very modern idea of **hegemonic stability** to explain the nineteenth-century’s Long Peace. In this analysis, the key factor is not so much the existence of a balance of power between European states – though that was highly significant in Europe itself – but the structural imbalance that grew up between Great Britain and the rest of the European powers. Unlike France, or so the hegemonic stability argument goes, Britain never sought to control mainland Europe, focusing instead on increasing its influence in the non-European world. It did so by doing what Britain seemed to do best: pushing ahead industrially; exporting increasing sums of capital to all corners of the globe; underwriting world trade through its overwhelming naval superiority; and teaching others the benefits of commerce and industry over more dangerous – and less profitable – pursuits such as war and conquest.

#### Learning question

In one or two sentences, do you think that the presence of a hegemonic state makes international society more or less prone to war? What examples would you use to justify your argument?

How long the nineteenth-century’s Long Peace (or what hegemonic stability theorists prefer to call the Pax Britannica) could have lasted remains a hyperthetical question, and has led to more than a few books and articles being written by international historians and IR scholars alike about its collapse with the First World War (often called the Great War) in 1914. Several different schools of thought exist. One sees the Great War as an inevitable consequence of change in the European **balance of power** following the unification of Germany in 1871 and its rapid emergence as a serious economic and military challenger to the status quo. It remains a commonly held view – especially influential in IR – that the rise of new powers will lead to increasing tensions between great powers, which over time are more likely lead to war than anything else. Others have broadened this thesis by arguing that Germany’s less-than-peaceful rise on the back of Prussian Chancellor Otto von Bismarck’s three wars of German unification (in 1864, 1866 and 1870) made armed conflict between Europe’s states more likely.

Others argue that the breakdown of the Long Peace could only occur within a larger set of changes that were taking place in the international system. According to this thesis, we should focus less on power shifts

brought about by the rise of a single state, and more on the by-products of the global struggle for influence between the various great powers. In other words, the key to understanding the collapse of the old order may be found in the processes of capitalism and imperialism. This remains the view of most Marxists, espoused in a pamphlet – *Imperialism* (1916) – by the great revolutionary V.I. Lenin. In it, he argues that peace had become quite impossible by the beginning of the twentieth century because of capitalists' determination to carve up the world in a **zero sum game**, in which one actor's gain means another actor's loss. In some ways, this is also the view of orthodox Realists, who see politics as an arena in which 'winner-takes-all'. Though they reject Lenin's economic explanation of the First World War, they agree that the odds of the Long Peace surviving under conditions of increased competition were slim. The end of the Long Peace was therefore no accident. Rather, for Marxists and Realists alike, it was the tragic result of conflicts inherent in an international system which could not be contained by deft diplomacy, carefully worded treaties, or states' adherence to a shared set of practices and norms.

Finally, there are many in IR who insist that the Long Peace was only possible so long as weapons technology remained relatively primitive. The coming of the industrial revolution, and with it new naval technologies, improvement in munitions and a rapid acceleration in the destructive capacity of arms, changed the way states fought, making new forms of war possible and, by definition, more destructive. This thesis claims that technology made war far more likely as one state after another began to invest heavily into these new weapons of death. This arms race may not, in and of itself, explain what finally happened in 1914. Nevertheless, the rapid build-up of modern military technology, in a world where war was still regarded as noble and heroic, made armed conflict more likely, increasing the insecurity of states great and small.

### Activity

One of the goals of this chapter is to show how IR theory can be used to make sense of the past. Using what you have learned about Realism, Liberalism, International Political Economy, and the English School, how do you think each school of thought would account for the beginning of the First World War? Provide a brief (one- or two-sentence) thesis statement for each of the following approaches.

IR theory	Explanation of the First World War
Realism	
Liberalism	
International Political Economy	
English School	

Stop and listen to the podcast 'IRs many explanations for the Great War' on the VLE

## The First World War

These explanations of the roots of the First World War all point to one self-evident truth: that when nations set out to kill each other in very large numbers, analysts are unlikely to agree about the causes behind the conflict. Some have even wondered whether the First World War need ever have happened at all. This approach – going under broad heading of counter-factualism – makes one major theoretical claim: that just because things happen in international affairs, it does not mean that they were inevitable. Even as we look for the causes of certain events, we need to remain sensitive to the fact that we are doing so after the events in question. Inevitability only exists in retrospect, and any claim that any event had to occur as it did should be viewed with a highly sceptical eye.

This issue has been raised in relationship to the First World War by Niall Ferguson who has been especially controversial in terms of rethinking 1914.<sup>2</sup> Avoiding the structural explanations described above and highly critical of those who argue that the war had to happen because of historical inevitability, he suggests that the whole thing was an avoidable tragedy, brought about not by German plans for European hegemony, the nature of the alliance system, or larger imperial ambitions – the normal fare of IR analysis – but by British miscalculations about the meaning of German actions in late 1914. Whether Ferguson is right or is merely being mischievous is an issue that cannot be settled here. However, he does raise a crucial question that we will explore further in the chapter on war: namely, how IR should set about explaining the outbreak of wars and what methods we should employ to best understand why wars happen.

Of one thing we can be certain, however, and here we can agree with Ferguson: the First World War marks the end of one epoch in world politics and the beginning of another. As we saw in the first chapter of this subject guide, the First World War was only the first of three great wars that came to define the twentieth century. In many ways, however, it was the most significant, not because it was the bloodiest (the Second World War lays claim to that dubious distinction) or the longest (the Cold War was 10 times as long), but because of the dramatic changes that it left in its wake. The list is long: the outbreak of the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the creation of the USSR; the emergence of the USA onto the world stage; the shift of financial and economic power from London to New York; the break-up of the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman empires; the first major stirrings of nationalism in what later came to be known as the Third World; a bitter sense of betrayal in Germany that helped bring Hitler to power 15 years later; new opportunities for Japan to expand its holdings in Asia; and a disastrous economic legacy that made it nigh on impossible to restore the health to the world economy. Furthermore, though some may not have realised it at the time, the devastation wrought by the Great War unleashed a series of changes that finally brought the age of European global dominance to an end. All of these were outcomes of a war whose fingerprints can be found all over the century that followed. The First World War, more than any other event, was the mid-wife of the modern world.

<sup>2</sup> Ferguson, N. *The pity of war: explaining World War One*. (London: Penguin, 1998) first edition [ISBN 9780713992465].

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## A reminder of your learning outcomes

Having completed this chapter, and the Essential reading and activities, you should be able to:

- explain some of the reasons why Europe emerged as the main driver of world politics by the end of the nineteenth century
- discuss competing explanations of the 'Long Peace' in Europe between 1814 and 1914
- evaluate different explanations of the causes of the First World War
- assess the impact of the First World War on IR in the twentieth century
- define the vocabulary terms in **bold**.

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## Chapter vocabulary

arms race	international history
balance of power	international society
capitalism	Long Peace
empire	nation
feudalism	state
hegemony	states-system
hegemonic stability	zero sum game
institutions	

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## Sample examination questions

1. How can international society be both ordered and anarchic?
2. What historical processes were responsible for the evolution of the state as the primary actor in IR?
3. Which best describes the current international situation: a balance of power, or hegemonic stability?

After preparing your answers, refer to the *Examiners' commentaries* on the VLE for targeted feedback on specific questions.

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## Chapter 3: The end of the Cold War

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Whatever else might be said about the cold war, the one thing it cannot be accused of is having failed to engage the interest of the western intellectual community... It was nearly the most important relationship we all had at the time.

*Cox, M. 'The end of the Cold War and why we failed to predict it' in Hunter, A. Rethinking the Cold War. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998).*

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### Aims of the chapter

The aims of this chapter are to:

- explain why different experts failed to predict the end of the Cold War
- outline some alternative theories dealing with the end of the Cold War
- discuss its consequences.

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### Learning outcomes

By the end of this chapter, and having completed the Essential reading and activities, you should be able to:

- explain what is involved for IR in the debate about the end of the Cold War
- explain how competing theories of IR explain the end of the Cold War differently
- explain how and why the end of the Cold War helped reshape the international system
- define the vocabulary terms in **bold**.

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### Essential reading

Cox, M. 'From the Cold War to the world economic crisis'.

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### Further reading

- Bennett, A. 'The guns that didn't smoke: ideas and the Soviet non-use of force in 1989', *Journal of Cold War Studies* 7(2) 2005, pp.81–109.
- Collins, R. 'Explaining the anti-Soviet revolution by state breakdown theory and geopolitical theory', *International Politics* 48(4/5) 2011, pp.575–90.
- Cox, M. 'Another transatlantic split?' American and European narratives and the end of the Cold War', *Cold War History* 7(1) 2007, pp.121–46.
- Cox, M. 'The uses and abuses of history: the end of the Cold War and Soviet collapse', *International Politics* 48(4/5) 2011, pp.627–46.
- Cox, M. 'Why did we get the end of the Cold War wrong?', *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 11(2) 2009, pp.161–76.
- Deudney, D. and G.J. Ikenberry 'The international sources of Soviet change', *International Security* 13(3) 1991/2, pp.74–118.
- English, R.D. 'Merely an above-average product of the Soviet Nomenklatura? Assessing leadership in the Cold War's end', *International Politics* 48(4/5) 2011, pp.607–26.



- Risse, T. 'Ideas, discourse power and the end of the Cold War: 20 years on', *International Politics* 48(4/5) 2011, pp.591–606.
- Snyder, J. 'The domestic political logic of Gorbachev's new thinking in foreign policy', *International Politics* 48(4/5) 2011, pp.562–74.
- Wohlforth, W. 'No one loves a Realist explanation', *International Politics* 48(4/5) 2011, pp.441–59.

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## Introduction

As our discussion of the causes of the First World War makes evident, the theories that we use to organise our knowledge about the world play a determining role in how we perceive and understand history. Thus, while a structural Realist might point to Germany's rising power as a destabilising factor in the anarchic international system of the early twentieth century, a liberal might look to the absence of formal international organisations capable of managing interdependence between states to avoid armed conflict. Marxists focus on the role of the class system and control of the means of production as defining characteristics, while the English School (ES) points out that war was still a completely acceptable means of conflict resolution in early twentieth-century Europe, making it a key institution in European international society in the years before the First World War. Theory frames the way that we see the world around us, highlighting and masking different aspects to produce contrasting sets of explanations. This use of theory separates IR from associated subjects like international history (IH). While IH generally tries to accumulate empirically-verified 'facts' about the past, IR is more interested in weaving those facts together to produce analyses and explanations of past and present. Given the vast – some might say infinite – complexity of human history, this weaving requires that we select some facts to include and some to exclude, trimming our empirical evidence to manageable proportions. This is the function of theory: to simplify the world around us to such an extent that we can make general comments about IR based on a limited number of cases.

In this chapter, we turn our attention to the ways in which IR understands one of the most crucial moments of the late twentieth century: the end of the Cold War. Just as Europe's imperial expansion from the fifteenth century laid the groundwork for the emergence of contemporary international society, the end of the Cold War played a vital role in shaping its practices and principles in the twenty-first century. The end of the Cold War was a tipping-point, transforming both the international system and IR as an academic subject. The way we think about the two decades that have elapsed since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 owes much to what happened before and during those key events. Indeed, many in IR continue to think about the post-Cold War world in terms of the bipolar global conflict that preceded it, using a variety of theoretical models to understand different aspects of this important period in international history.

This chapter will look at a number of issues related to the end of the Cold War. First, we will consider the difficult problem of prediction, ably illustrated by the fact that not a single expert in IR anticipated the events of 1989 and 1991. We will then ask who, if anyone, actually 'won' the Cold War; and why IR has produced so many different explanations of its end. Finally, we will examine the consequences of the end of the Cold War for the international system and IR.

## The failure of prediction

The social sciences have long grappled with the problem of prediction. Some see prediction as central to the success of the social sciences, an indispensable tool if we want to control what happens in the world around us. In this sense, prediction is an unavoidable part of IR. Others argue that the complexity of human civilisation and our limited ability to accumulate and process knowledge make accurate prediction impossible.

Though it provides interesting food for thought, we do not need to get too involved in this debate to see the difficulties of prediction. The most immediate evidence is the failure of anyone in IR to see the end of the Cold War coming. Instead, the vast majority of IR scholars and writers were in thrall to theories that failed to account for the possibility that the international order could or would change so completely. One reason was the tendency of scholars in IR to reify international actors and structures – treating dynamic, contested, and evolving systems as if they were static, unified and fully developed. The problem of **reification** continues to plague many subfields in IR. This is particularly true with reference to states, which are often treated as stable, cohesive and fully developed actors on the world stage, akin to an individual human being in its ability to speak with a single voice on any given issue. This assumption simplifies the state and allows us to make generalisations about state behaviour, a key goal of IR. At the same time, it underestimates the likelihood of change, leaving analysts surprised and shocked when states are transformed by events going on inside and outside their borders. In the late 1980s, reification led many academics and policy-makers to believe that Mikhail Gorbachev's reforms of the Soviet Union would have little influence on either the USSR or the international system. His reforms, it was assumed, would not lead to a Soviet withdrawal from Central and Eastern Europe, much less to the collapse of the Soviet system. For a student just starting out in IR, it should be comforting to know that even the experts are sometimes embarrassingly wrong.

There are many more specific explanations of why the experts failed to see that the end was nigh in 1989. One of these argues that because many in the discipline saw orderly virtue in the bipolar structure of the Cold War international system, they were deeply reluctant to contemplate its collapse. This was particularly true of structural Realism – discussed in Chapters 1 and 5 of this guide – which assumed that the structural stability of the international system would block any large-scale systemic change. This analysis, located at the **systems level of analysis**, focused on the constraints imposed on actors' autonomy by the international system itself. By assuming the stability of these constraints, IR blinded itself to the possibility of their passing between 1989 and 1991.

Another explanation of IR's failure to predict the Cold War's end emphasises the way in which the West understood – or misunderstood – the USSR as a system of power. This explanation, carried out at a **unit level of analysis** that focuses on the actors that make up international systems, overestimated the power and threat of the Soviet Union while at the same time ignoring its many weaknesses. Until very late in the day, the working assumption of most policy-makers (and academics) was that while the Soviet state contained many flaws, these would not threaten its stability. They assumed that its planned economy would continue to muddle along and that the Kremlin would never surrender control of its satellite states in Central and Eastern Europe. Why should it? By maintaining a cordon sanitaire between its Western borders and those of

the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the Soviets kept Germany divided, NATO on the defensive and the USSR safe from a surprise attack by the Western powers. Analysts' reification of the USSR therefore masked its internal weaknesses and contradictions, leaving IR unable to grapple with the possibility of its collapse in 1991.

At the heart of the debate is the complex figure of the Soviet leader, Mikhail Gorbachev. A strong case has been made that it was nearly impossible to predict the end of the Cold War because it was nearly impossible to predict that a figure like Gorbachev could emerge. Experts carrying out research at this **individual level of analysis** did not anticipate how far he would go along the path of political reform. Moreover, Gorbachev may not have been master of his own domain. There is a great deal of evidence to indicate that he was less in control of events than his apologists would claim; and that what happened in 1989 was largely an unintended consequence of his policies. Given all of this, how then could anybody have predicted the end of the Cold War? Even those with the greatest access to information – the American intelligence community – missed the boat. They argued that the USA should take advantage of Gorbachev's reforms to extract as many concessions as possible from the Russians, but they could not assume that the USSR would continue along its reformist path. Indeed, there was every chance that Gorbachev would be overthrown by hard line critics within the Soviet state, who would then turn the political clock back to more adversarial days of the Cold War.

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### Activity

Using the table below, list a few possible explanations for the 2008 global financial meltdown at the systems, unit, and individual levels of analysis. More specifically, who would analysts blame for the crisis at each level? Once you have filled in the table, identify the level that you think best explains international events. Keep track of this as you think about other events in this course, from the end of the Cold War to 9/11 to the Arab Spring.

Level of analysis	Cause of financial crisis	Who is to blame?
Systems		
Unit		
Individual		

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## Who won the Cold War?

If IRs failure to predict the end of the Cold War has been controversial, so too has its inability to generate a single, generally-accepted explanation of the event since 1991. In the USA, there has been a concerted effort within the conservative wing of the Republican Party to claim credit for the end of the Cold War, with special accolades falling to President Ronald Reagan. Reagan, they claim, won the Cold War by being bold, tough and decisive – in effect competing aggressively with the Soviet Union by increasing US military spending and confronting the USSR in the Third World. Eschewing the weak policies hitherto pursued by his predecessors – including one or two other Republicans – Reagan is

thought to have showed the way: forcing the USSR to the negotiating table in the second half of the 1980s and compelling the Soviets to retreat around the world thereafter. Reagan's advocates argue that it was not just the economic strength of the West or the appeal of democracy that defeated communism, it was US leadership and the tough, no-nonsense policies pursued by its strong conservative leader, who refused to appease America's enemies. It is a theoretical position heavily influenced by Realism and its emphasis of the distribution and use of power within the international system.

The view that Reagan won the Cold War by pursuing a strategy of 'peace through strength' has not gone unchallenged. Critics note that during his second term, Reagan achieved more as a result of engagement with Gorbachev than through his earlier policy of confrontation. Nor was it the USA alone that helped bring the unrest to an end. Its European allies played a vital role in bringing the Cold War to a peaceful conclusion, from the British Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher – who initially suggested in 1984 that Gorbachev was someone with whom we 'could do business' – to German Chancellor Helmut Kohl – who energised German foreign policy in October and November 1989 by pushing for German unification. The 'Reagan won it' school of thought is also attacked on the more general grounds of focusing too much on one individual and ignoring the larger structural forces at play in the international system. Many members of the ES agree with this attack, preferring systems-level explanations that focus on the sustainability of 'Western' institutions – including as capitalism and representative democracy – over their 'Soviet' rivals which included centrally-planned economics and popular democracy in the Soviet style.

#### Learning question

In the previous paragraph, we looked at an explanation for the end of the Cold War that emphasises the importance of Western engagement with the Soviet Union over the role of military and political confrontation.

In a short paragraph, explain which of the theories mentioned in Chapter 1 best captures this argument. Be sure to include a thesis statement at the beginning of your paragraph that sums up your argument.

You can post this paragraph to the course section of the VLE for feedback from your peers and the academic moderator.

## IR theory debates the end of the Cold War

Within academia, the debate about the end of the Cold War has today assumed a somewhat different character. Reagan and US policy are still given their place in the hierarchy of causes, but the focus has moved from the role of individuals to what might be termed 'objective' factors operating at higher levels of analysis. There are a wide variety of narratives from which to choose. These range from internalist explanations that stress the extent of Soviet economic decline by the 1980s and fall squarely into unit-level analyses; to systems-level explanations that focus on the ability of Western capitalism to globally outcompete its centrally-planned economic rival. Many contemporary Realists have become attracted to this type of explanation. According to the most interesting of these – William Wohlforth, Dartmouth College – the events of the 1980s can readily be explained in basic material terms. The Cold War was caused, he argues, by the rise of the Soviet Union and the extension of its power after the Second World War. Logically, it came to an end when the economic bases of that power began to decline in the 1980s.

Though it has its fair share of academic supporters, this interpretation also has its critics. It may be true, its critics accept, that the Soviet economy was in deep trouble and the USSR overstretched. But, as they point out, the economy was hardly collapsing when Gorbachev took over in 1985. Moreover, though Soviet foreign policy came with a very high price tag, it was not so high as to force the collapse of the entire Soviet system. Instead, these alternative analyses insist that the active role played by ideas led to an important shift in Soviet thinking over the course of the 1980s. Gorbachev's new thinking was meant to take the USSR beyond its traditional theories of a global class struggle between two international camps. Some of Gorbachev's new ideas came from within the USSR itself, especially from its various 'think tanks'. Several others came from within the larger leftist and socialist movement around the world. Even Western peace movements, which had grown up in the 1970s and early 1980s, played a role in helping Gorbachev rethink Russian security within a larger, pan-European context. His idea of a new 'European home', in which all states could achieve security without military blocs, arose within the context of ongoing debates that he and his advisers were having with Western thinkers and writers. True, these debates were only one factor that helped Gorbachev develop his world view before and after taking power in 1985. Yet the evidence seems clear. Ideas, domestic and international, mattered a great deal in the USSR and helped persuade the Soviet leadership to break out of its old security dilemma in order to find another way of doing business with the rest of the world.

Stop and reread the subsection 'Social constructivism' on pp.5–6 of the Introduction

The role of ideas in bringing the Cold War to an end has been championed by a group of thinkers whom we first read about in Chapter 1 and will discuss in more detail in Chapter 6: the Constructivists. As an influential school of thought in IR, **Constructivism** has its roots in the events that took place between 1989 and 1991. Constructivists accuse Realists of having neither a theory of historical change nor any understanding of the active role played by ideas in bringing about the end of the Cold War – in other words of **material determinism**. Each is certainly a powerful way of attacking Realism, echoing the concerns of other critical theories within IR. Constructivists in particular argue that because of Realists' theoretical attachment to Cold War bipolarity, they were ill-equipped to explain, let alone predict, its unravelling. Consequently, Constructivists argue that Realists became mere onlookers with nothing of importance to say about the end of the Cold War.

Such attacks on Realism have continued from a variety of quarters ever since, with one after another being published in a series of influential articles and books which appeared from the early 1990s. These have gradually worn away the once impregnable Realist edifice. In fact, so successful have these attacks been that even though Realism has retained many important followers, Constructivism and other alternative conceptions of the international have now established themselves as intellectually powerful currents within the discipline. By the end of the 1990s, it would be fair to say that Constructivism, alongside Liberalism and Realism, become one of the subject's more influential theoretical approaches.

### Activity

Different theories are intended to answer different sorts of questions. Use the table below to think about the sorts of questions that Realism, Liberalism, Constructivism, and the English School are best suited to answer in relation to the end of the Cold War.

Theoretical approach	Question
Realism	<b>Example:</b> What role did the distribution of power within the international system play in the collapse of Cold War bipolarity?
Liberalism	
Constructivism	
English School	

## The international system after the end of the Cold War

As we have suggested throughout this course, the period from 1989 to 1991 was one of incredible importance to IR. Like the three great crises of the twentieth century that gave birth to IR (see Chapter 1), the end of the Cold War was a transformational moment that changed international society – including the world economy – forever. Naturally, critics of this view argue that change is ever-present in world politics and that other events have been just as important in shaping international affairs. There is something to this argument. However, it is difficult to think of another event between 1947 and 1991 that has had the same impact on the world as the end of the Cold War. Certainly, none altered the balance of power and the structure of the international capitalist system in anything like the same way. The question is not whether the end of the Cold War was a critical juncture in the longer history of the twentieth century. It obviously was. Rather, we need to consider the impact it actually had. The best way to do this is to focus on what actually happened to specific countries and regions.

### Communism after Communism

The immediate consequences of the end of the Cold War were felt first in communist states and varied widely from place to place. Some communist governments simply collapsed, most obviously those which had been taken over by the USSR in the wake of the Second World War. These states, such as Poland and Hungary, reoriented their foreign policies westwards, in effect becoming part of the West through membership of NATO and the European Union (EU). Others followed a different trajectory. Yugoslavia descended into a bloody civil war. Fortunately, the breakup of the Soviet Union was comparatively peaceful, though conflicts did break out on its periphery, most notably in the Caucasus and parts of Central Asia. The experiences of the former Soviet republics have been mixed. The three Baltic states – Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania – managed to anchor themselves within the Western, democratic camp. Other states such as Belarus, Uzbekistan and Russia itself followed alternative paths.

The Russian Federation, which succeeded to the bulk of Soviet territory and population, is an especially interesting and important case. For a short while, it looked as if Russia was moving into the Western camp. With the election of President Vladimir Putin, however, it became clear that the transition in Russia was not moving in the direction originally mapped out for it by the West and its Russian allies. This will probably not lead to a 'new' Cold War as some have speculated. However, it has left Russia's relationship with the West in a delicate state, subject to regular misunderstandings and always liable to veer out of control.

Other communist states followed an even less predictable trajectory. Far from the end of the Cold War in Europe leading to the wholesale collapse of communist power around the world, some communist states stabilised and even widened their control over people and territory. This is most obviously true in China, where the communist party reasserted its control following the bloody suppression of protests in Tiananmen Square in 1989. But it was also true in other states such as Cuba, Vietnam and North Korea where the grip of ruling parties has proved tenacious. This has had disturbing consequences in North Korea. Whereas China and Vietnam – and more recently Cuba – have progressively deepened their integration into global market by liberalising their economies, North Korea has sought security by developing its own nuclear arsenal as **deterrence** against international intervention. Thus, the end of the Cold War made North Korea more of a danger to the stability of the international system even while it opened space for the integration of other communist states into mainstream international society.

### Whatever happened to the 'Third World'?

We can trace an equally complex set of results in what became known during the Cold War as the **'Third World'**. In these largely postcolonial states, the anti-imperialist promise of national liberation and justice gave way – after 1989 – to something quite different. In some cases, 'socialist' experiments simply abandoned talk of planning and equality in favour of far-reaching market reforms. In India, this produced impressive socioeconomic results. In other countries, the end of the Cold War led to socioeconomic disaster, with regimes once justified in the name of Marxism giving way to tribalism and banditry. This process has been especially brutal in sub-Saharan Africa, particularly around the Horn of Africa – Somalia, Ethiopia, Eritrea, southern Sudan and northern Kenya. Here, longstanding rivalries that had once been masked by Cold War alliances percolated to the surface of international affairs. In some cases, this ended in victory for one of the dominant factions fighting for control of all, or part of, the state. For example, in Angola and Mozambique, former Marxist rebels defeated their opponents and became the new ruling class. In places like Somalia, the state simply imploded with terrible consequences for local populations and the international community alike, and each must now face down immense challenges posed by rampant poverty, piracy, terrorism and persistent food shortages in a country without a state.

Political change after 1991 was accompanied by far-reaching economic reform of the Third World. In the next chapter we will look in more detail at globalisation: a process whose acceleration has arguably been one of the more important outcomes of the end of the Cold War. While the end of the Cold War may not have been the primary cause of the new global economy that emerged in the 1990s, it made the case for market-oriented reforms almost irresistible. After all, how could one argue for a non-capitalist,

planned road to economic development in less developed countries when that very model had just collapsed in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union? Prior to 1991, it could be claimed that, whatever its many faults and weaknesses, central planning was a viable approach to development located outside of the world market. After 1991, it was no longer possible to make this case with any degree of seriousness. The alternative had been tried and it had failed, leaving former communist states to implement fundamental liberal economic reform at home – including the privatisation of state assets and allowing firms to go bust – while at the same time opening up their once closed economies to the wider world market. The economic costs were high. The social consequences were certainly problematic. But, at the end of the day, there seemed to be no other way.

## Europe

Although the end of the Cold War produced deeply ambiguous results in the Third World, its effects were far more positive in Europe. There is now widespread agreement that, however difficult the transition from the Cold War turned out to be, the results have generally been economically and politically beneficial for the continent. Germany did not start acting like the Germany of old, as some pessimistic Realists thought it must do in order to steady the balance of power against America's newfound status at the top of the international system. Outside the former Yugoslavia and the Caucasus, Europe did not descend into the nationalist conflicts that defined the first half of its twentieth century. Instead, in spite of a rocky economic and political start, most of Central and Eastern Europe made a reasonable transition towards the liberal marketplace and the relative security of the EU.

Later in this course, we will discuss ways in which to think about Europe as a special kind of 'power' in the international system. For now, we will look at another, equally interesting, problem: how and why did Europe manage the transition out of communism with such success? At least three answers have been suggested.

The first involves identity. For decades after the Second World War, the peoples of Eastern Europe were compelled to live under what many of them regarded as foreign rule. This alienated them from the USSR and reinforced their admiration for the West. When the Cold War finally ended, these former Soviet satellite states could return 'home' to Europe and the West – from which they had been separated since at least 1945. This sense of a common European identity was reinforced by the fact that only a few of the USSR's former satellites had been fully and completely locked away behind the **iron curtain**. East Germans, for example, clearly knew what life was like in West Germany. More generally, Eastern Europeans were aware of (and attracted to) what they imagined life to be like in Western Europe. Sometimes their fascination with all things Western bordered on the naïve. Still, it meant that when they finally had the chance to join the object of their fascination, they did so enthusiastically.

Europe's transition was made easier by the success of the European project, particularly its organisational embodiment: the **European Union**. Formed after the war as a means of reconciling the aspirations of previously warring states – Germany and France in particular – Europe's common market gradually evolved from a narrowly defined economic body towards something like a genuine political community. As it grew numerically, it also expanded its functions. By the time the European Community (EC) became the European Union (EU) in 1992, it had the support of the overwhelming majority of Europeans, who associated



their prosperity and democratic rights with the existence of an integrated Europe. Gorbachev himself was much impressed with what had been achieved in Western Europe since the late 1940s, and was a great admirer of the EC – particularly the central part it played in integrating the once fragmented continent. The role the EC/EU played in persuading the USSR to give up its hold over Eastern Europe is an important, though understudied, part of the story of 1989. Regardless, the EC/EU played an enormous role in holding the European states together at a time of great turmoil, and facilitating the economic and political transition of the post-Communist East. There is no way of knowing what might have happened without the EC/EU, but it is not unreasonable to suggest that without it, the end of the Cold War would have created many more problems for Europe and the wider world.

Finally, Europe was especially fortunate in that it is home to the world's most successful collective security alliance: NATO. Formed in 1949 with what its first Secretary-General termed the triple purpose of 'keeping the Russians out, the Americans in, and the Germans down', NATO was critical in holding the West together through the Cold War and in helping Europe negotiate its way through the security problems that followed 1991. In all of this, the USA was a crucial player. It is easy enough to be critical of America's foreign policies during and after the Cold War. However, during the critical years of transition it successfully reassured allies and former enemies alike. Hegemons are not always popular, and in Europe – especially in France – many dreamed that the continent would soon be able to look after its own security needs without American assistance. However, as the Cold War gave way to the 1990s, one thing became abundantly clear: the USA remained an indispensable part of Europe's security architecture.

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## A reminder of your learning outcomes

Having completed this chapter, and the Essential reading and activities, you should be able to:

- explain what is involved for IR in the debate about the end of the Cold War
- explain how competing theories of IR explain the end of the Cold War differently
- explain how and why the end of the Cold War helped reshape the international system
- define vocabulary terms in **bold**.

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## Chapter vocabulary

Constructivism	material determinism
deterrence	reification
European Union	systems level of analysis
individual level of analysis	Third World
iron curtain	unit level of analysis

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## Sample examination questions

1. Why has the end of the Cold War been the subject of so much debate in IR?
2. What role did individuals play in ending the Cold War?
3. Would you place more emphasis on ideas or economics in explaining why the Cold War came to an end?
4. Why have post-communist states been impacted differently by the end of the Cold War?

After preparing your answers, refer to the *Examiners' commentaries* on the VLE for targeted feedback on specific questions.

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## Notes